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# Lodge and Viet Policy

## State Dept. Shuffle Highlights Key Role

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WASHINGTON — A major shakeup in State Department personnel handling American policy in South Viet Nam has dramatized the unique role of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge in that embattled Southeast Asian country.

Until now, at least, Lodge has led a somewhat charmed life and served as a lightning rod for both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

His presence in Saigon has often appeared to be the equivalent of an "off limits" sign to GOP politicians who would like nothing better than to zero in on President Johnson's inherited woes in Viet Nam.

**THE CHANGES** within the State Department involve the departure of the assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs, Roger Hilsman, for a university teaching post. Until recently, Hilsman had been a key figure in the shaping of U.S. policy toward South Viet Nam.

A special task force has been established to co-ordinate the activity of all departments and agencies dealing with the U.S. - supported war against Communist guerrillas seeking to subvert the Saigon regime. Its chairman is William H. Sullivan, an assistant to the undersecretary of state for political affairs, W. Averell Harriman.

Hilsman, a former director of the State Department's intelligence and research bureau, played a significant role in the U.S. response to Russia during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. He was one of the late President Kennedy's chief advisers in that episode.

Mr. Kennedy had persuaded Hilsman to remain in government after Yale University had offered him a high academic post in 1961. Partly because of his military experience as a West Point graduate and a guerrilla expert behind the Japanese lines in Burma during World War II, Hilsman was asked to take over the Far Eastern post in 1963.

Recently, Hilsman received other offers from universities and felt he ought to discuss them with President Johnson. Time was running out on one preferred offer, and last week the President told the State Department official in an amicable meeting to go ahead and accept it.

But it is no secret that the outspoken and vigorous Hilsman had stepped on toes not only in the Pentagon but also in Saigon. His relations with Lodge have been increasingly strained, according to reports.

**LODGE'S ROLE** in Saigon also has been a major source of frustration to Republican critics of the administration's foreign policies.

Last week, for example, New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller loosely identified Lodge with the alleged "mess" in South Viet Nam, saying that if the ambassador didn't agree with administration policy his "only alternative is to resign and come back and say what is wrong."

Someone must have advised Rockefeller that Lodge, GOP vice presidential candidate in 1960 and a possible write-in candidate of some proportions in the New Hampshire presidential primary on March 10, might take offense.

In any case, Rockefeller telephoned Lodge in Saigon to explain that he was responding to a reporter's question and



Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge confers with the latest Vietnamese leader, Nguyen Khanh. (AP)



ROGER HILSMAN WM. SULLIVAN

intended no specific criticism of the ambassador.

**THE FACT** is that Lodge has played a crucial role in U.S. policy ever since he took up his assignment last summer. According to a reliable account of the record, he has acceded to, or initiated, almost every move made in the American-backed military action against the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas.

In the period before the coup against President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother-adviser, Ngo Dinh Nhu, which resulted in the death of both men, the U.S. ambassador not only executed Washington policies but helped to inspire them with his reports from the scene.

Lodge was given this leeway by the late President Kennedy, who appointed him, precisely because Mr. Kennedy wanted his new envoy to feel he was a vital cog in the South Vietnamese operation and not just a political catspaw.

Those familiar with the details of the appointment, however, say that Lodge was offered a choice of assignments, and preferred Saigon because he spoke French and because, as a reserve major general, he had made a special study of the Vietnamese military problem.

**FROM THE DAY** he went to Saigon, which was ahead of schedule because of a growing crisis in the political situation within the Diem regime, Lodge has been far more than just another dutiful ambassador.

Some officials concerned with the problems of Southeast Asia have felt, on occasion, that Lodge was exceeding his mandate. But their mild protests went unheeded because if Lodge felt that he was a kind of political hostage to the administration, the administration knew that he could quit and blow the whistle on it any time he chose.

According to Johnson administration sources, Lodge is still "calling the shots" in Saigon.